



Golden Memories are shared during the Imeldahof 50th Anniversary Celebration

This has been an emotional week of reminiscences and making new memories for the personnel, past and present, of the Imeldahof Center for Children. The staff, headed by Director Dynia Abath-Muller welcomed back six of the nuns of the order of the Dominican Sisters of Bethany, part of the original staff of the Imeldahof for a week filled with events for this Grand Golden Anniversary.

Founded in November of 1954 by Sister Imelda, the name means in Dutch “Imelda’s Children’s Garden” and has been a haven for children from troubled homes between the ages of six and fourteen, offering a structured environment and counseling to help them cope socially.

The objective is to offer a temporary refuge and guidance for children unable to remain in their own homes whether due to mental or physical abuse, neglect, or alcohol or drug abuse on the part of the parents. In some cases, it is simply a family of divorce, with more children than a single mother can handle.

Imeldahof can accommodate a maximum of fifty-two children divided into four groups depending on the kind of care they require, with a maximum of fourteen children per group. Each group resides in their own house, functioning as an independent unit. There are four trained group leaders with at least an Associate’s degree in social work, and one domestic. These groups are:

1. Crisis and observation group
2. Long term group
3. Intense treatment group
4. Therapeutic day care group.

The primary aim of Imeldahof is to offer the children safety and structure. Children with specific emotional and behavioral problems are guided by a specialist in deviant behavior. There are general programs of group activities, ballet, music, tae kwon do and arts and crafts to help develop all aspects of the children. They are required to attend school as usual.

In the early years of Imeldahof the nuns focused on the three “B’s” Bread, Bed and Bath, but alumni of the center will tell you they did so much more.” They gave us “Unconditional Love” reports Dr. Margarita Clement, keynote speaker at the reunion held at the Roseland on Wednesday evening, “They were Mother, Father, Sister and Brother.” However, as the center was placed into the administration of laypersons, the concept has changed to a more structured guidance system. This is largely because many of the children are coming from “multi-problem” families and this required that all personnel, particularly group leaders have a higher level of training. These highly trained personnel were thrilled to share the week with the six of the sisters that helped to establish the center, and several events that were generously donated by the restaurants and hotels where they took place.

On Wednesday evening after a special Mass held at the Santa Anna Church in Noord the Divi Resorts hosted over 150 employees, administrators past and present, and former charges of Imeldahof at the Roseland Center in the Alhambra Shopping Mall. Addressing the gathering was one of the first administrators Mr. Francisco Celaire and Imeldahof alumni Dr. Margarita Clement and Rita Dake, who lived at the center from the time she was seven until her marriage at twenty-three and became their first Aruban employee.

On Thursday, November 25th, the actual anniversary of Imeldahof, the Sisters of Bethany, the personnel and all of the children of Imeldahof were treated to a celebratory lunch at El Gaucho Restaurant on the Whilaminastraat.

Decked out in the Imeldahof tee shirts they took the place, and the World Radio Holland and their local affiliate, Radio Kelkboom, covered the event for radio.

The week culminated in a Gala Dinner and Dance in the Grand Ballroom of the Wyndham Hotel attended by Governor Fredis Refenjol and the directors of many of the other social agencies of the island. Sister Veronica addressed the dinner gathering with emotional memories of the first days of Imeldahof, and after dinner, they were joined by many of the Alumni to dance the night away to the island music of Robert Jeandor and his band. Even Sister Helene, ever full of life and humor, was on the dance floor for a lively meringue. When the Sisters were ready to leave, the grown-up former charges begged them to stay for a while longer, as for some of the Sisters it is nearly twenty years since they have been in Aruba.

Congratulations to Imeldahof Center on their Golden Anniversary, for fifty years they have been pioneers in Aruba's Social Services.

Dr. Margarita Clement: A Shining Example

Dr. Margarita Clement came to the Imeldahof as a very young girl with her older sister. They were two of eight children of a broken home, and it was more than their mother could handle. She will tell you that being placed in Imeldahof was a blessing..

“Always in my mind is what the sisters said to me, “You can make a difference, you are responsible for your destiny, go into the world and make us proud.” The sisters recognized the potential of this warm hearted, brilliant woman, and she has made them and Aruba, proud.

Gaining her degrees on scholarship from the University of California in L.A. School of Nursing, she went on to earn scholarships for her Masters from Loyola Mary Mount University and a P.H.D. in Psychology. Her specialty was in education of others to be counselors for rehabilitation of Drug and Alcohol Abuse. She makes here home in California, and is part of a team considered one of the most expert on Bipolar Disorder. They are involved in the researching and clinical testing of new medications for this disabling condition. Dr. Clement is also author of “Characteristics of Women that Stay Married to Bipolar Men” and is in the process of writing her memoirs “Kindness is the Hardest Thing to Give Away-Because it is Always Returned.”

Dr. Clement is also an active lobbyist in Washington, D.C. for more productive mental health legislation.

She has received honors beyond mention, and was invited by the Royal Family of Saudi Arabia to open a Psychiatric Clinic at the hospital tin the capital.

Doctor, Author and Inventor, Dr. Clement saw the need for something, and she created it.. Working with the sick and she devised a cushioned body wrap that helps make it

easier to move them without causing the patient discomfort, and helps to protect and prevent bedsores. As the very sick become thinner, the body wrap can be additionally padded to accommodate the patient's needs.

Dr. Clement is also a technical advisor to the film industry, often given scripts dealing with mental disorders to proofread for inaccuracies. She has coached a number of actors and actresses in depicting characters with mental problems.

Aside from all her these activities she is on the staff of the Los Angeles Veterans Hospital, working with the addicted and homeless veterans. She choose this ill paying position because she is doing well enough without a salary, but in a desire to give back to her adopted country. "How better than to treat those that fought for their country?" A member of the National Alliance for Mental Illness, she is on the board NAMI Veterans Committee.

At the Thursday night reunion, Dr. Margarita Clement personally presented each of the sisters a beautiful long stemmed rose. She also donated Nintendo's and DVD players to each of the Imeldahof houses. These are material things, but here accomplishments and contributions to the world and her patients are gift that will live on. She thanks the Sisters of Imeldahof, and credits them with inspiration and foundation that motivated her.